STAFF REPORT
PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE: MAY 22, 2012

CASE NO: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

REQUEST: CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED CIRCULATION, LAND USE, AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ELEMENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

LOCATION: CITY-WIDE

APPLICANT: CITY OF LA QUINTA

BACKGROUND:

The 2035 La Quinta General Plan update is nearing completion and is anticipated to be released this summer for public review and comment. Although the update is essentially a refresh of the current General Plan, there are a number of changed factors since 2002 which have affected the direction of the project. The purpose of this study session is to explore how those factors have influenced the two most important elements of the General Plan update, Land Use and Circulation, and to introduce and discuss some of the critical issues being addressed. The study session will also introduce the new Sustainable Community Element and how it has been shaped by environmental concerns and state legislation.

CONSOLIDATION OF LAND USE DESIGNATIONS:

As was presented to the Planning Commission early in the General Plan Update process, the draft General Plan includes a consolidation of Land Use Designations – there will be two residential designations instead of the current five; three commercial designations instead of the current seven; and two open space designations instead of the current four. These designations will correspond to existing zoning districts which will not change. Table 1 on page 2 shows the relationship between the new General Plan designations and the Zoning Ordinance.

As the General Plan map is being proposed for consolidation, Table 2 on page 3 identifies the current and proposed General Plan land use allocations by acreage, highlighting the acreage differences between the existing and proposed consolidated land uses, including developed and undeveloped acreage.

Table 1
Zoning Designation Consistency Matrix

General Plan Designation	Zoning Designation
Low Density Residential	RR – Rural Residential Overlay EOD – Equestrian Overlay RVL - Very Low Density Residential RL – Low Density Residential A/ER – Agricultural/Equestrian Residential RSP – Residential Specific Plan Overlay*
Medium/High Density Residential	RC - Cove Residential RM – Medium Density Residential RMH – Medium High Density Residential RH – High Density Residential RSP – Residential Specific Plan Overlay*
General Commercial	CR – Regional Commercial CP – Commercial Park CC – Community Commercial CN – Neighborhood Commercial CO – Office Commercial
Tourist Commercial	CT – Tourist Commercial
Village Commercial	VC – Village Commercial
Industrial/Light Manufacturing	Industrial/Light Manufacturing
Major Community Facilities	MC – Major Community Facilities
Recreational Open Space	PR – Parks and Recreation GC – Golf Course
Natural Open Space	OS – Open Space FP – Flood Plain HC – Hillside Conservation Overlay
*Can occur in any residential zone, base zone governs density.	

Table 2
Existing General Plan Land Use Allocation, City Limits

	Existing General Plan			Proposed General Plan		
General Plan Designations	**Develop-ed**	**Un-developed**	**Total**	**Developed**	**Un-developed**	**Total**
VLDR Very Low Density up to 2 du/ac	261	198.2	459.2	4,006.0	1,583.7	5,589.7
LDR Low Density up to 4 du/ac	3,202.50	3,096.90	6,299.40			
MDR Medium Density up to 8 du/ac	1,063.90	324.2	1,388.10	1,292.4	373.6	1,666.0
MHDR Medium-High Density up to 12 du/ac	14.5	69	83.4			
HDR High Density up to 16 du/ac	0.6	86.7	87.3			
Total Residential Acreage	**4,542.40**	**3,775.00**	**8,317.50**	**5,298.4**	**1,957.3**	**7,255.7**
M/RC Mixed Commercial	87.9	309	397	385.6	184.0	569.6
CC Community Commercial	24.2	93.7	117.9			
NC Neighborhood Commercial	61.8	50.8	112.5			
CP Commercial Park		64	64			
O Office		39.9	39.9			
TC Tourist Commercial	206.2	145.3	351.5	206.6	138.9	345.5
VC Village Commercial	64.4	68.8	133.2	77.1	12.9	90.0
Total Commercial Acreage	**444.5**	**771.5**	**1,216.00**	**669.3**	**335.8**	**1,005.1**
MC Major Community Facilities	178.3	13.1	191.3	252.7	193.8	446.5
P Park Facilities	601.3	128	729.3	4,392.2	867.0	5,259.2
G Golf Course Open Space	3,125.30	986.7	4,111.90			
OS Open Space	1,246.20	4,258.70	5,505.00	2,171.6	4,761.7	6,933.3
W Watercourse/Flood Control	468.9	132.8	601.7			
Street Rights of Way				1,764.6	191.1	1,955.7
Total Other Acreage	**5,619.90**	**5,519.30**	**11,139.20**	**8,581.1**	**6,013.6**	**14,594.7**
Grand Total	**10,606.70**	**10,065.80**	**20,672.60**	**14,548.8**	**8,306.7**	**22,855.5**

The draft General Plan does not significantly change the allocation of land in the City. Table 2 compares the land use allocation in the existing General Plan with the proposed General Plan. The differences fall into a few limited categories:

- Lands that were Low Density Residential and have since been developed to include golf courses have reduced the residential acreage and increased the

Open Space Recreation acreage.

- Lands that were designated Commercial and Low Density Residential changed to High Density Residential, either for specific projects or for consistency with the newly adopted Housing Element.

- Lands designated residential in Section 5, at the south end of the City that have been bought by public agencies for preservation as open space under the Multi-Species Plan.

- Lands annexed into the City since 2002, including and in particular lands south of Avenue 58 and west of Monroe.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FUTURE

As the City builds out and responds to State mandates to reduce air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce traffic congestion by reducing vehicle trips, an effort has been made in the draft General Plan to address these issues.

A Sustainable Community Element has been added that provides direction for the conservation of air and water resources, and the reduction of energy use and vehicle trips. All these principles contribute to the City's ability to "live within its means" in terms of resource conservation. This Element also addresses ways that projects can be designed, or redesigned, to increase their appeal to bicyclists, pedestrians and golf carts.

This analysis led to the consideration of Mixed Use as a tool for the City's planning tool box. Staff considered adding a General Plan designation for Mixed Use, but determined that it is impossible to determine where these projects might occur. Instead, a Mixed Use Overlay is proposed for the Zoning Ordinance. This Overlay would allow Mixed Use development on any parcel zoned for Commercial development, based on performance standards and development standards to be added to the Zoning Ordinance.

By adding the Overlay to the Zoning Ordinance, the City will have the ability to consider individual projects on their merits, and the development community will be able to place these projects where the market dictates. As an example, because the General Plan is a long term document, Mixed Use could be proposed on a portion of a parcel whose supermarket becomes obsolete in 5 or 10 years.

Staff has prepared a visual presentation of the wide variety of Mixed Use development types that could occur in the future for discussion at the meeting. The presentation will illustrate that Mixed Use can take many forms, and be developed vertically,

horizontally, on a small or a large scale. It provides the City with an opportunity to expand its housing market, and offer a type of residential product not previously available in the City. And it allows the City to play a part in the improvement of the environment, both locally and regionally.

TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION IN THE 2035 GENERAL PLAN

The adequacy of the City and Valley transportation system has a profound effect on the economy of the region and on the quality of life. The Circulation Element update is meant to address the various community issues associated with physically moving people and goods, and realistically addressing existing development and projected local buildout conditions. The Element's analysis and policy recommendations have also been developed within the context of local and regional land use and transportation planning efforts (Attachment 1). Extensive traffic and related transportation modeling was conducted for existing and future traffic conditions in the City and the surrounding Coachella Valley region. Therefore, the transportation analysis conducted for the Circulation Element is first described followed by a discussion of the major issues that are addressed in the Draft Circulation Element.

The La Quinta Traffic Analysis Model (LQTAM)

A detailed, multi-iteration Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) was prepared to analyze land use scenarios and their effects on major roadways and intersections in the La Quinta General Plan planning area. The TIA presents the results of analyses performed to 1) evaluate existing traffic operations in the City, and 2) detail the impacts of the new Preferred Land Use Plan for buildout year 2035 (see Preferred Land Use Plan). The TIA also addresses the broader mobility issues of the City, including opportunities to better manage traffic and encourage the shift to greater use of alternative modes of travel, including transit, bicycles, pedestrians, and golf carts/Neighborhood Electric Vehicles (NEVs).

As part of the analysis, a focused and detailed travel demand model for the City was developed and calibrated based on existing and planned land uses and the traffic they generate. The trips generated by land uses in the model are then distributed by time of day as well as direction of travel, and then assigned to specific street segments. In addition to providing General Plan traffic forecasting, the TIA will facilitate an informed analysis of future projects such as specific plans and development plans.

The La Quinta Traffic Analysis Model (LQTAM) covers not just all of the Coachella Valley but all six counties in the SCAG region as well. It is a focused, fined-grain and refined version of the regional model developed by the County, known as the 2008 RivTAM model. For purposes of providing a detailed and tailored analysis for the City General Plan a new transportation analysis zone (TAZ) structure was developed. The

land uses in each TAZ are analyzed across a wide set of parameters and the resulting traffic is distributed across the roadway network and assigned to specific streets and specific times of the day.

The LQTAM's 949 zones were designed to cover the La Quinta planning area, include the Sphere of Influence (SOI), and to aggregate a set of zones outside of the area. Of the 949 zones, 101 zones were contained within the City of La Quinta, 22 zones were contained within the SOI, and the remaining 826 zones cover the surrounding cities and county areas. It should be noted that certain areas in the RivTAM model that are influential to future traffic in the La Quinta planning area, especially those adjoining the southeast quadrant of the planning area, reflect land uses that are more intense than those assigned by the currently adopted County General Plan. Extensive efforts were undertaken to adjust buildout conditions in this area to reflect the current County General Plan.

LQTAM Modeling Results

The LQTAM analyzed 63 roadway segments and 37 intersections within the city limits and SOI. The analysis indicates that the General Plan buildout of the Preferred Land Use Plan will require enhanced improvements and/or management strategies to be implemented at 23 intersections analyzed in order to provide traffic operations at acceptable peak hour Levels of Service (LOS D or better) during the peak season. Some of the identified improvements are in adjacent cities, and others may impact adjacent land uses.

Of the 37 intersections analyzed, the four intersections listed in Table 3 have the potential to be operating at unacceptable levels of service by 2035 General Plan buildout. Of the 63 roadway segments analyzed for average daily operations, 57 are forecast to operate at acceptable peak season LOS. Table 4 lists 3 segments that are forecast to operate at LOS E and 3 that are forecast to operate at LOS F based on the standard capacities set forth in the General Plan (Attachment 2).

Table 3
Intersections with the Potential to Operate at LOS E or F
2035 General Plan Buildout

Intersection	Projected Level of Service (LOS)	
	AM	PM
Washington St. @ Fred Waring Dr.	F	F
Washington St. @ Miles Ave	D	F
Miles Ave @ Adams St.	D	E
Madison St. @ Avenue 50	E	F

Table 4
Roadway Segments with the Potential to Operate at LOS E or F
2035 General Plan Buildout

Roadway Segment	Projected Level of Service (LOS) Daily
Washington St.: Ave 42 to Fred Waring Dr.	E
Washington St.: Fred Waring Dr. to Miles Ave @ Miles Ave	F
Washington St.: Highway 111 to Avenue 48	E
Washington St.: Avenue 48 to Eisenhower Dr.	E
Madison St.: Avenue 54 to Airport Blvd (Ave 56)	F
Harrison St.: Airport Blvd. (Ave 56) to Avenue 58	F

Physical improvements at intersections and roadway segments which would be needed to provide traffic operations at acceptable peak hour LOS D or better are not considered to be feasible if the approach to providing acceptable peak period LOS is solely through traditional roadway widening. However, the TIA and General Plan Circulation Element gives consideration to alternative physical improvements and expands the use of management strategies that will require an ongoing commitment to systems operations. Where additional physical improvements are not practicable, transportation management programs discussed below may deliver LOS D operations in 2035 to these constrained intersections and roadway segments. These include implementation of a "Complete Streets" strategy that maximizes opportunities for alternative modes of travel, including transit, walking, bicycling, golf carts and NEVs.

Complete Streets and Other Management Strategies

The California Complete Streets Act (Assembly Bill 1358, signed into law in 2008) requires that any substantive local General Plan Circulation Element revision, "plan for a balanced, multimodal transportation network that meets the needs of all users of streets, roads, and highways, defined to include motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, children, persons with disabilities, seniors, movers of commercial goods, and users of public transportation, in a manner that is suitable to the rural, suburban, or urban context of the general plan." Successful long-term implementation of this policy is intended to result in:

- More options for people to go from one place to another,
- Less traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions,
- More walkable communities (with healthier, more active people), and
- Fewer barriers for older adults, children, and people with disabilities.

Management and operations of the City's arterial network includes monitoring of actual levels of service. This will allow for identification of timely capital improvements, and/or initiation of transportation demand management (TDM) and transportation

systems management (TSM) programs during peak season peak periods and other times of the year. Finally, intelligent transportation systems (ITS) will also help the City get more out of its infrastructure. With the thoughtful application of recommended physical improvements and management strategies, it is expected that most components of the City's transportation system will operate at acceptable levels of service upon General Plan buildout.

CIRCULATION ELEMENT UPDATE:

As noted earlier, the update to the Circulation Element is a direct outgrowth of the evolution of land use and development in the City, its SOI and in surrounding areas of the valley. The update has also been affected by changes in legislation and in the need to coordinate long-term transportation planning on a regional level. The refined and tailored LQTAM assures that the City-based analysis is as accurate as possible while remaining consistent with the regional traffic model (RivTAM).

Land Use Patterns and Transportation Planning

As noted above, existing and future land use patterns shape demand for transportation services and facilities in the City and the valley. Land use efficiencies are affected by densities, diversity and proximity of mixed land uses, and have a direct effect on how, when and where traffic is generated. The General Plan update reflects development trends in both City and regional land use moving toward a more closely integrated grouping of land uses. This integration and intensification of land uses can reduce the need for travel outside the neighborhood by, for example, providing shopping within walking or biking distance of homes.

As the City plans its transportation system through the year 2035, it is assumed that the City will continue to serve as the premier destination golf resort community in the valley. While permanent residents will continue to comprise the majority of community traffic, seasonal traffic volumes can increase by up to 30% between late fall and early spring and can be further affected by major special events such as the annual Humana Challenge golf tournament, La Quinta Arts Festival, BNP Paribas Tennis Tournament, and Coachella and Stagecoach music festivals. The transportation issues currently faced by the City and the Coachella Valley include low occupancy per vehicle, a substantial physical separation between employment and housing in the region, and the established roadway network.

Optimizing Land Use and Transportation Planning

On average, 25% of vehicle trips are between home and work, while most of the other 75% are short trips -- running errands, picking up the kids and other local trips. With this understanding, the updated Land Use Element better reflects the need for proximity of homes to schools, shops and business centers. This proximity of

complementary land uses will allow more people to walk, bike or use a golf cart or NEV, and reduces demand for roadway capacity.

The mandates associated with State Senate Bill 375 require increased vehicle occupancy, mixed-use and transit oriented development, and use of mass transit systems. La Quinta may have a natural advantage in facilitating the use of alternative modes of travel, especially golf carts/NEVs. In addition, the high number of service jobs in the community and region should encourage the location of bus stops within a ten-minute walk, or easy bicycling distance between residential neighborhoods and employment centers. The City's neighborhoods can be protected from the impacts from noise, and vehicle emissions can be minimized by shortening or eliminating vehicle trips.

Transit-Oriented Land Planning

Historically, most urban development was centered around mass-transit, which also generated a need for commercial activities such as buses, taxis and car rentals services, hotels, restaurants, shopping, newsstands and convenience services. Today, many transit-oriented developments also incorporate employment centers, such as professional office, entertainment retail and high-density housing.

Public transit is not currently well utilized in La Quinta or the region. Transit-oriented land planning may have limited application in the City in the immediate future, but it is evolving, and future efforts should be made to maximize the accessibility and efficiency of the transit system. Features that make transit systems efficient include short direct routes and minimum time between the point of origin and destination. Frequent buses on a route reduce headway (waits between buses) and thoughtful interconnectivity with other routes increases the efficiency of transfers.

The Highway 111 corridor and the "Village" area of the City offer some potential for transit-based land use planning. To be effective, higher density residential development should be planned in the vicinity of bus routes. Such housing must also be affordable and appealing to those in the service and retail industries that are more likely to take advantage of transit services. Transit-oriented residential development should also be located close to schools and commercial services. Bus stops should be located within a ten-minute walk of housing and major employment areas. Major stops should include facilities that allow for park-and-ride, and the parking of bicycles and golf carts or NEVs.

Transit Centers

Further consideration should be given to improvements to Highway 111 and adjoining corridors that shift travel from private cars and trucks to alternative modes, including public transit, golf carts, ride-sharing, car-sharing, bicycling, bicycle-sharing, and

walking. The City shall consider the establishment of transportation centers that are multi-modal and allow transportation modes to intersect. They should be conveniently sited, with prospective locations including:

- Washington Street/Fred Waring Drive/Via Sevilla
- Miles Avenue /Adams Street
- Adams Street/Hwy 111/Avenue 47
- Avenue 47/Caleo Bay Drive
- Washington Street/Calle Tampico
- Eisenhower Drive/Avenida Montezuma

Roundabouts

The City is host to roundabouts at the intersection of Jefferson Street and Avenue 52 and elsewhere, and while this experiment in innovative intersection design has been the subject of much discussion, the roundabout has real advantages that may be applicable to other City intersections. While roundabout speeds are relatively low (15 to 20 mph), traffic never stops, so there is a lot of capacity in this type of intersection design if properly utilized. Another advantage of roundabouts is the relative ease of use, potential long-term cost savings, and avoidance of having to stop traffic. Roundabouts can also be used as a traffic-calming device in areas with low vehicle volumes and higher numbers of pedestrians and bikers, where they may also have four-way stop controls. The General Plan Circulation Element makes provision for the use of roundabouts as an alternative to conventional signalized intersections. These opportunities have been identified in the southeast portion of the planning area.

Bike Boulevards and Multi-Use Paths

Bike lanes/paths and multi-use paths are expected to play a major role in the diversifying the City transportation system (Attachments 3 and 4). Bike and multi-purpose paths are a system of routes that can provide a convenient connection between neighborhoods, schools, parks, shopping, restaurants, dog parks and other activity centers. Bike lanes are being provided for use by bicyclists, and in many instances golf carts and NEVs. Multi-use paths are designed to support a mix of cyclists, walkers, joggers and skaters. Portions of these paths may also serve equestrian users.

Multi-use paths provide opportunities for economic benefit and growth by providing pedestrian and bicycle access to restaurants and other businesses, without the need for additional parking and traffic congestion. In addition, these paths can increase property values and tourism and recreation-related spending on items such as bicycles, in-line skates and lodging. Property values are also positively affected in communities with a well-developed multi-use path network which enhances health and recreation benefits -- according to a 2000 National Association of Home Builders survey of what

active adults and older seniors want in their communities, walking and jogging paths ranked #1.

The Circulation Element update provides ambitious plans for a network of bicycle/golf cart/NEV lanes and multi-use paths that would connect residences, commercial services and open space areas. The plans for multi-use paths have been more finely tailored to enhance alternative access to the City's activity centers.

Circulation Element Goals and Policies

The update to the Circulation Element incorporates many of the policies and programs of the existing 2002 General Plan. The update also includes a wide range of new policies and programs designed to more closely coordinate land use and transportation planning. The update also includes an overarching design philosophy of "Complete Streets" described above, which is designed to provide facilities for the full range of users not just automobiles and trucks.

New policies also address the need for new approaches to land planning, as mandated by AB 32 and SB 375. The General Plan update identified the Highway 111 corridor and the "Village" area as well suited for mixed use development that places complementary land uses in proximity to one another and reduces the need to use a car.

Finally, as an alternative to simply expanding the physical infrastructure in order to meet future transportation demand, the updated Circulation Element also provides for the implementation of transportation demand management (TDM), transportation systems management (TSM) programs, and intelligent transportation systems (ITS). Each of these management and technology-based approaches will also help the City get more out of its infrastructure.

CONCLUSION:

Changes in the economy, growth trends, state legislation, and public concerns have all affected the direction of the General Plan update. While many of the challenges are unavoidable, staff will be proposing to implement the most practical solutions to address them in the General Plan update. This study session review is provided to inform the Planning Commission and City Council of those challenges and solutions and to reaffirm that the update is proceeding in a direction consistent with their vision for the City.

Following the conclusion of the discussion on these issues with the City Council at their June 5th 2012 meeting, staff will proceed with the finalization of the General Plan document, including the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR). It is currently expected that the draft General Plan and General Plan EIR will be ready for public

review and comment on July 6, 2012 and that public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council will occur in September 2012. As the Planning Commission is aware, the General Plan EIR will be released for a 45 day public comment period, during which Staff plans to conduct an additional community outreach meeting in order to present the draft General Plan and EIR to the City's residents and businesses.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission consider the proposed Land Use, Sustainable Communities, and Circulation Elements, provide comments and suggestions as to the solutions being proposed, and direct staff to make any adjustments deemed necessary.

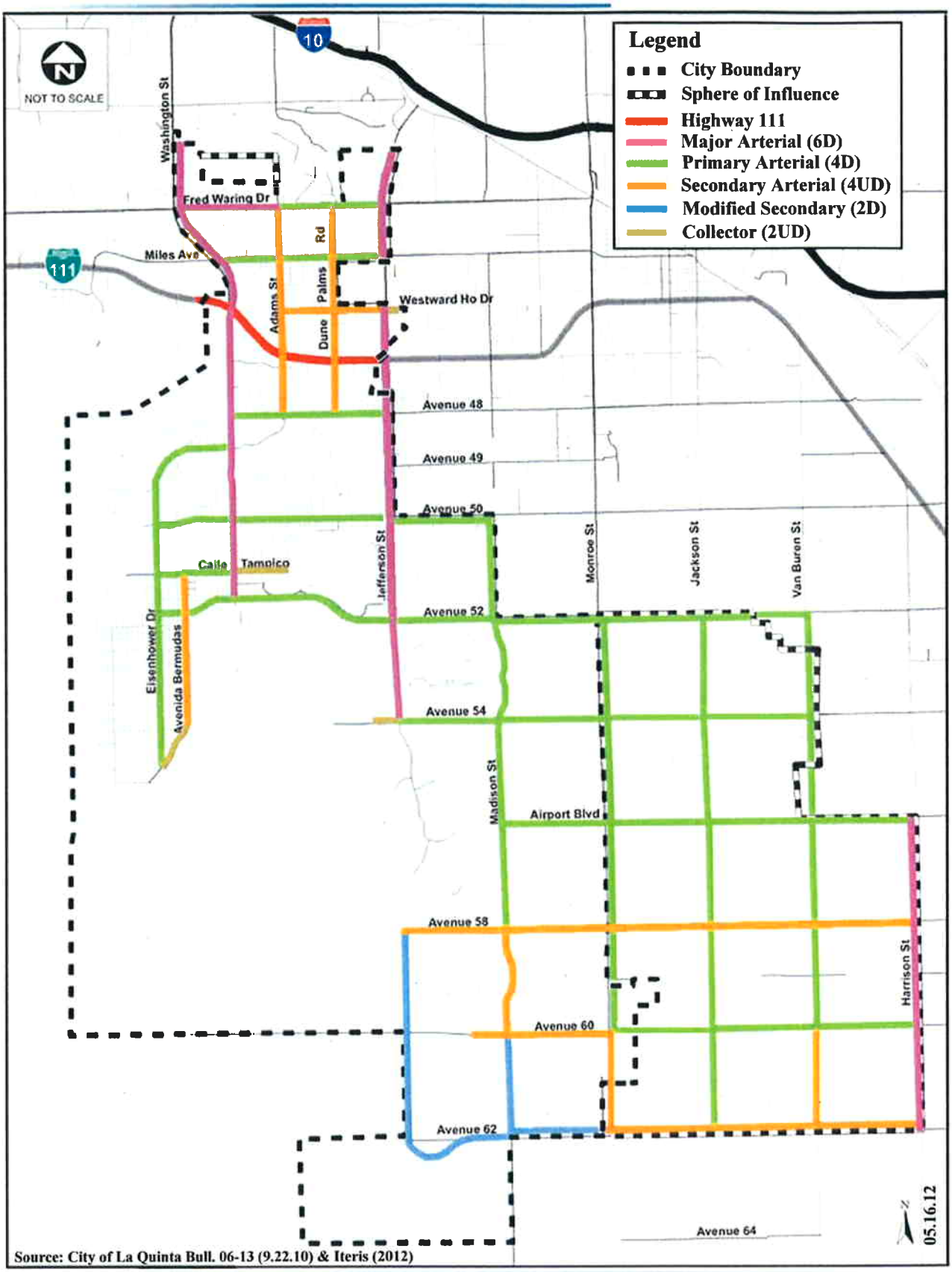
Prepared by:

Les Johnson,
Planning Director

Attachments:

1. Roadway classification maps
2. Exhibit showing the four constrained intersections and six segments
3. Proposed bicycle lanes plan
4. Multi-use path plan

ATTACHMENT # 1



Source: City of La Quinta Bull. 06-13 (9.22.10) & Iteris (2012)

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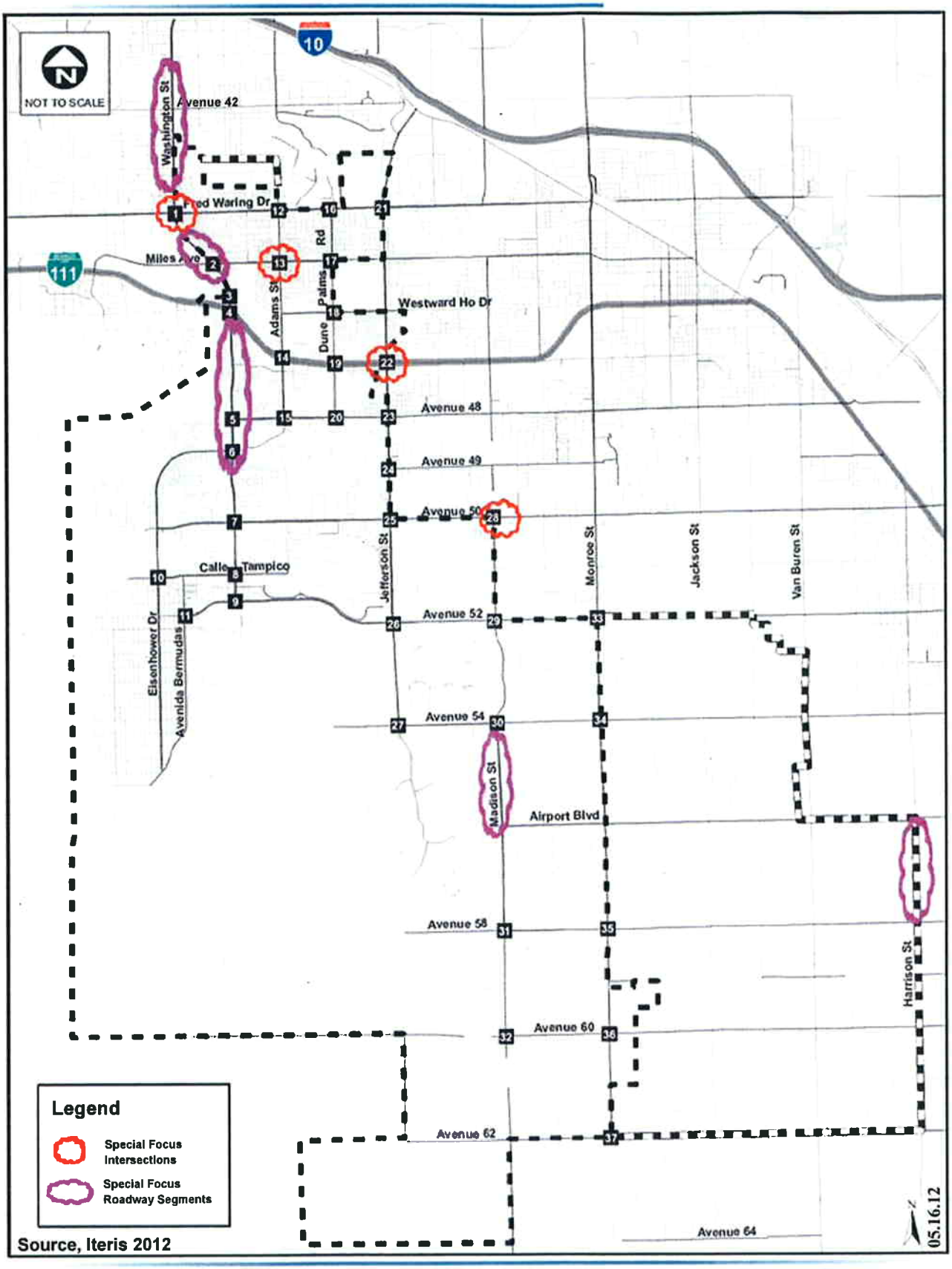
City of La Quinta General Plan
City Roadway Classifications
La Quinta, California

La Quinta 2035 GENERAL PLAN

Exhibit

ATTACHMENT # 2



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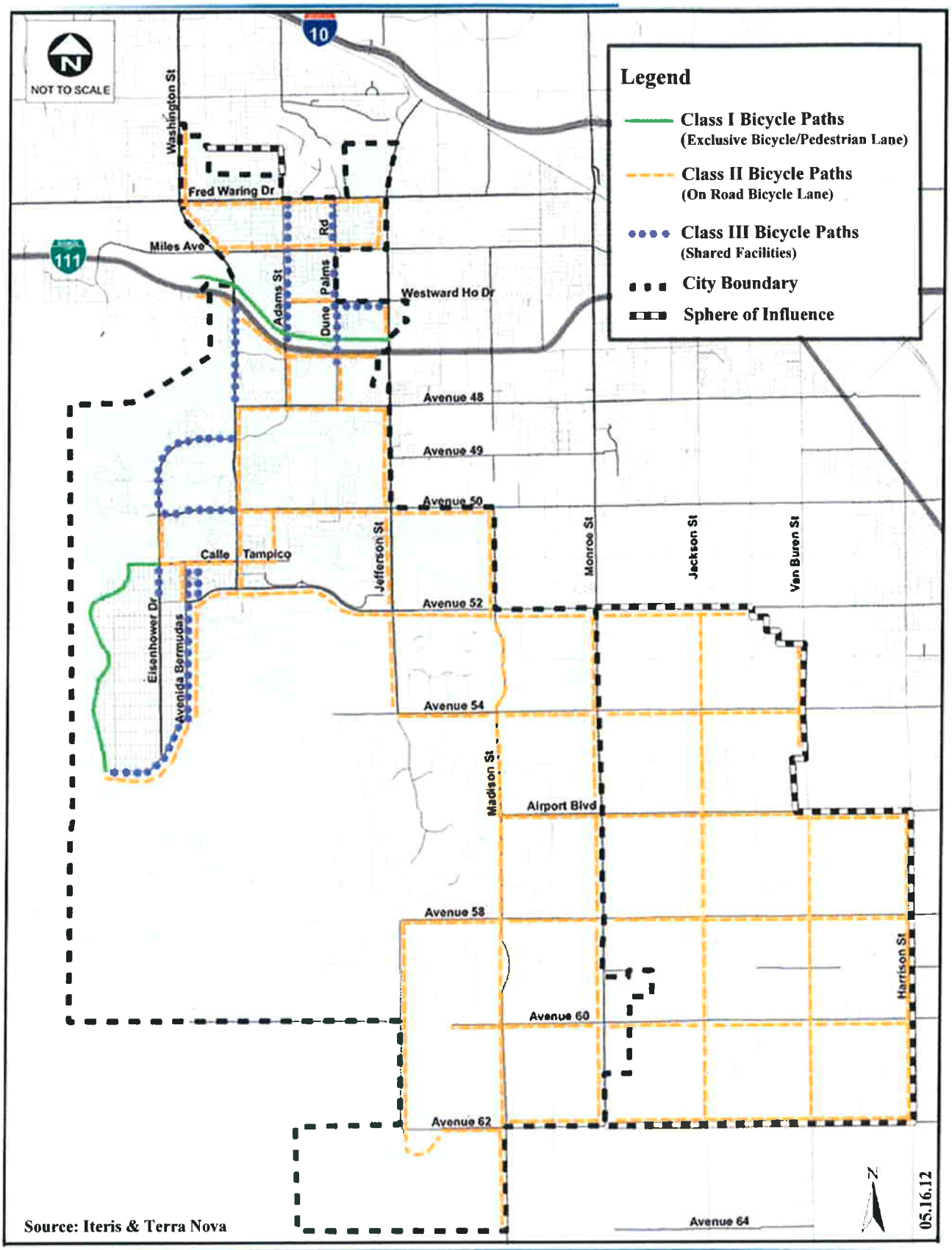
City of La Quinta General Plan
Roadway Network Special Focus Area
La Quinta, California

La Quinta 2035 GENERAL PLAN

Exhibit

ATTACHMENT # 3



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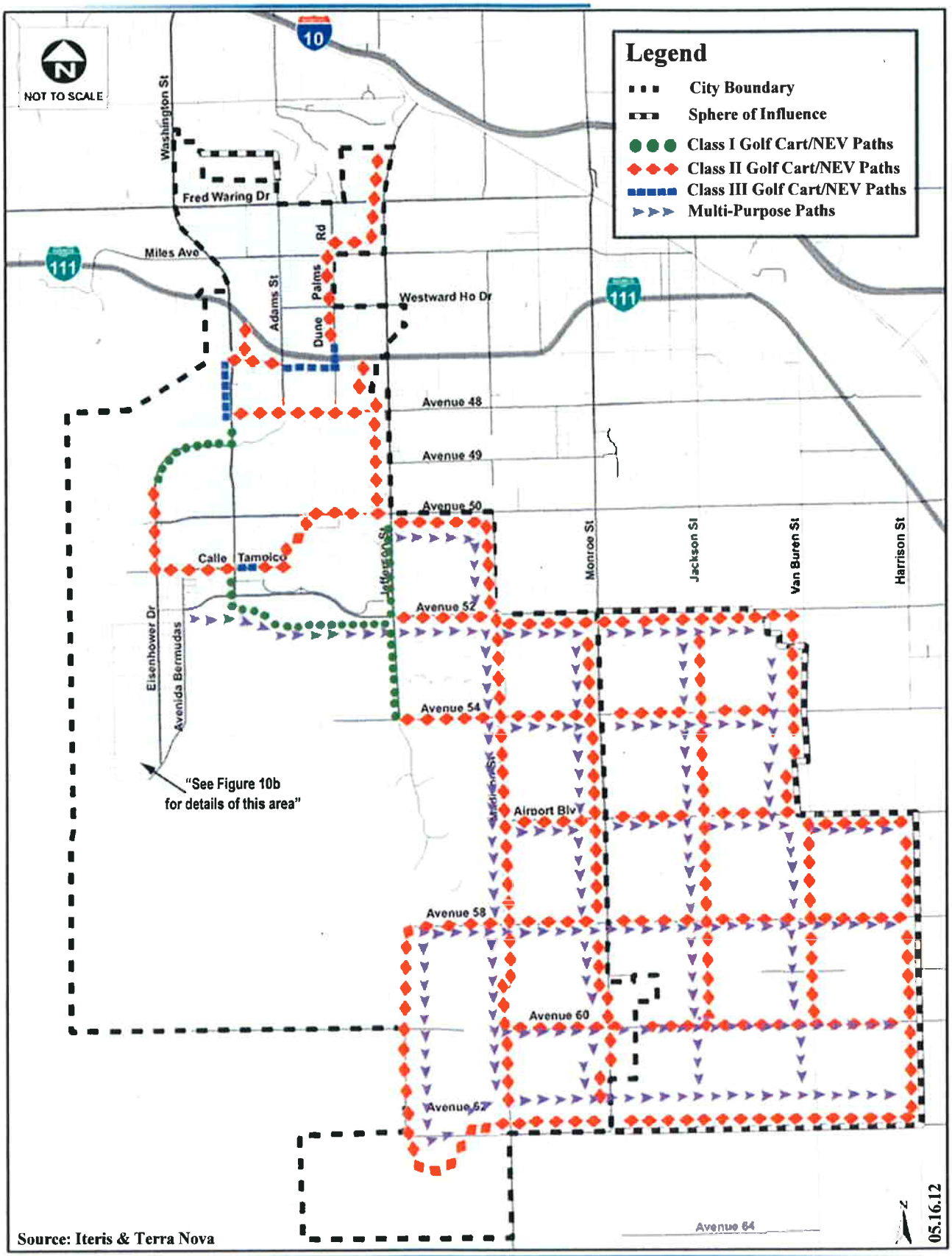
City of La Quinta
Bike Paths Master Plan
La Quinta, California

La Quinta 2035 GENERAL PLAN

Exhibit

ATTACHMENT # 4



Source: Iteris & Terra Nova

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City of La Quinta General Plan
Golf Cart / NEV Paths
La Quinta, California

La Quinta 2035 GENERAL PLAN

Exhibit